

# The INQUIRER

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the voice of British and Irish Unitarians and Free Christians Issue 7724 13 June 2009

## **Why we worship**

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# The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

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**"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."**

*From the Object passed at the  
General Assembly of the Unitarian and  
Free Christian Churches 2001*

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## Inquiring Words

*The Rev Jane Barton, recently retired from the Brighton congregation, was recently asked to present the '60-second Sermon' on BBC Southern Counties radio. She shares what she said here.*

Welcome to the 60 second sermon.

'...like an ever rolling stream' is a familiar metaphor for the passing of time. Those words, from 18th century hymn writer Issac Watts, carry with them a sense of inexorable movement, of which we are an implicit part. Over two and a half thousand years earlier, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, also wrote of rapidly moving water, but suggested a different message when he wrote, 'You cannot step twice into the same river; for other waters are ever flowing on to you.' Here the image has us standing still as the ever rolling stream flows round us.

I believe that how we view time influences how we live – physically, mentally and spiritually. Do we see it as something that is divided into seconds, hours, months and years with ourselves, our physical bodies, being part of the ticking clock? Or can we consider time as being of a more cyclical nature, patterned with 'timeless' moments – glimpses of the transcendental time spoken of by the mystics and suggested in the words of TS Eliot: 'And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we began and to know the place for the first time'

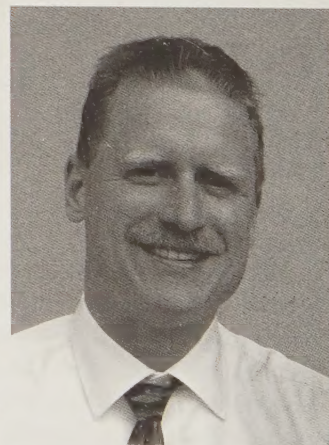
By not measuring our lives in the passing of days or weeks but rather as sacred journeys of spiritual self discovery – independent of age or ability – we can be freed from a sense of 'time running out'. Thus we are encouraged to live more fully in the moment for we know not when, or from where, the insight ... the 'knowing' will come upon us.

## Resignation from Essex Hall

On 19 May, Peter Teets, staff member at Essex Hall in charge of District and Congregational Support, announced his resignation from the General Assembly. Writing in an e-mail posted on the GA list, Peter said, 'I have enjoyed working at Essex Hall and it has proved to be an invaluable experience, as it afforded me many opportunities to learn new skills and to meet many new people and new friends. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all personally for the help and support that you have given me throughout my employment.'

The announcement was quickly followed by a message from the HR Group of the Executive Committee which said: 'Peter will be missed at Essex Hall and his work for the denomination

has been much appreciated. We would like to thank Peter on behalf of the General Assembly, for his contribution to our work. We wish him well in the future.'



*Peter Teets*



# Ours is the wonder of worship

**Tom McCready** asks how do we worship in the absence of dogma and common beliefs?

We Unitarians have no set theology, no liturgy. We have no list of approved beliefs and we have no creeds. There is nothing that we are forced to believe, and there is nothing that we are forbidden to believe. We explore a variety of approaches to the sacred and we embrace a diversity of ideas about the sacred. Yet we are more than just a debating society; we do not meet simply to discuss various ideas about god and humanity.

We meet to worship.

We meet to open our hearts and our minds to that which has ultimate value and meaning in our lives, and to that which gives our lives ultimate meaning and value. In various ways, we meet to share our appreciation of the sacred dimension of life; to bring our individual human experience to a collective acknowledgement of our human need to seek the pattern of the transcendent presence that is woven into the fabric of every fragment of our living.

We meet to find our place, and to find our peace in the relationship between the universal and the personal, between the ultimate and the intimate.

We try to do this through contemplation of the scriptures, of our history and of the music and poetry of praise and wonder left for us by those who came before us. We try to do this through dialogue, reflecting together to form a response to the changes and challenges of our times; to give voice to all our feelings and longings for dignity and decency in our daily lives; to give shape to our gratitude for the little delights and comforts of life we all enjoy.

We try to worship by seeking to forge a voice with which we can speak for sympathy and understanding for those sorrows which all must share; and for courage and compassion for those victims of the violence and injustice that afflict our troubled world. And we worship by simply bowing our heads and opening our hearts before the infinite beauty and mystery of an ultimately unknowable universe. From our different begin-



nings and at our different stages on our individual journeys we come together in common purpose in this simple, sacred space.

We meet to worship.

Why do we worship? We worship to connect. We worship to feel connected. We worship to feel connected to something that is greater than the individual self, yet does not negate the individual self. We worship because something in us, deep within us knows that there is a mysterious essence or presence, an inner wholeness or oneness, within life and within ourselves that we can touch in worship – that there is a kindness and lightness of being that we can touch and be touched by. We worship to connect with the deepest reaches of our own being, and to reach from the depths of our own being towards the source and purpose of life. We worship to connect.

How do we worship? With words, with music and with all our human arts.

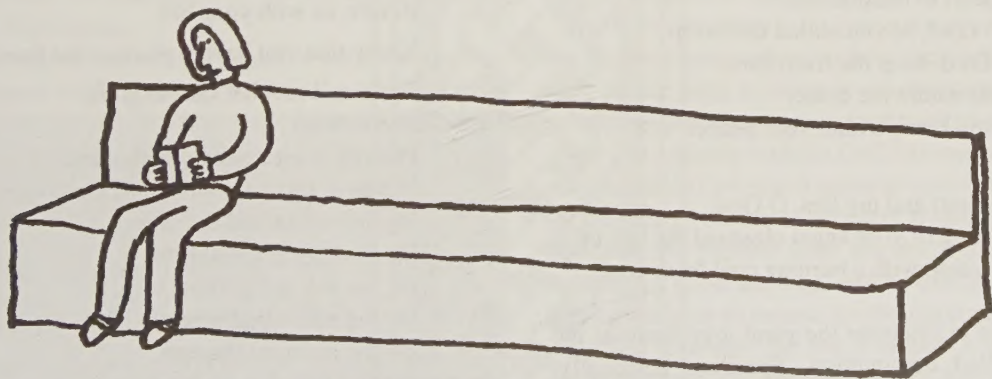
In prayer, in poetry and in song. With our minds, with our hearts, with our emotions, with all our individual gifts. We worship through our needs, through our sorrows and regrets, both articulate and unexpressed. We worship through shape and colour and through movement. And in silence; and in stillness; for worship is a celebration and an affirmation of everything we are, have been and could be, and of everything that shapes and moves us.

And what do we worship? Now that, you might think, is the tough one.

We worship that which is of supreme value: that which represents the supreme meaning and value in life. Does that have to be God? Do we need God? Can we do without God? Can we worship without God? Well of course we can!

We can do without God as long as we fully appreciate the power and importance of human love; but we had better know what we're talking about and we had better mean what we're saying and we had better treat the tremendous and transforming force of simple, human love with all the respect that it deserves or we're in trouble. We cannot encounter that love or approach the moment of knowing that love with anything less

*(Continued on page 4)*



THIS IS MY PEW  
THIS HAS ALWAYS BEEN MY PEW

Dave Walker  
CartoonChurch.com



# 'We lay our lives before you'

Inspired by a powerful spiritual tradition, a Celtic Communion was offered by **Jane Barraclough** at the GA meetings.

## Greeting, from *Eternal Echoes* by John O'Donohue

The day is a chase after ghost duties; at evening you are exhausted. A day is over, and so much of it was wasted on things that meant so little to you, duties and meetings from which your heart was absent.

Months and years pass, and you fumble on, still incapable of finding a foothold on the path of time you walk. A large proportion of your activity distracts you from remembering that you are a guest of the universe, to whom one life has been given.

You mistake the insistent pressure of daily demands for reality, and your more delicate and intuitive nature wilts... Your way of life has little to do with what you feel and love in the world but because of the many demands on you and responsibilities you have, you feel helpless to gather your self; You are dragged in so many directions away from true belonging.

## Liturgy

**Leader:** Out of darkness came light;

**ALL:** And the power of God was revealed

**Men:** in the running wave and the flowing air,

**Women:** in the quiet earth and the shining stars.

**Leader:** Out of the dust came life;

**ALL:** And the image of God was revealed

**Men:** in the human face and the gentle heart,

**Women:** in the warmth of flesh and the depth of soul.

**Leader:** Out of justice came freedom;

**ALL:** And the wisdom of God was revealed

**Men:** in the need to grow and the will to love,

**Women:** in the chance to know and the power to choose.

**Leader:** And God looked at the creation,

**ALL:** And behold, it was very good.

## Meditation

I weave a silence into my mind.

I weave a silence onto my lips.

I weave a silence within my heart.

I close my ears to distractions. I close my eyes to attractions.

I close my heart to temptations.

Calm me, O Lord, as you stilled the storm.

Still me, O Lord, keep me from harm.

Let all tumult within me cease.

Enfold me, my Lord, within your peace.

## Silence

Cleanse my heart and my lips, O God,  
who by the hand of your angel cleansed the lips of  
the prophet Isaiah with a burning coal from your  
altar. Amen.

There are many ways to celebrate the great love feast, as the early Christians called communion. Speaking personally, sometimes it is a specific memorial and thanksgiving for the life and teaching of Jesus, sometimes it is a thanksgiving for the elements of life that feed us and nourish us.

But in the parables of Jesus the feast is often used as an

image for the kingdom. His dream of a new world on earth, a reign of justice in which we will live at peace with one another and God.

And **all** are invited. We can know this in theory but can we live it in practice? Can we practice the ancient and sacred art of hospitality, radical hospitality?

And can we allow ourselves to arrive, to rest, to belong?

And who deigns to show up to the feast? Are we too busy, too preoccupied with the fuss and strangeness of our man made world?

The parable of the wedding feast appears in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, but this version from Thomas says something very particular to our times:

## Reading: Gospel of Thomas - 64.

Jesus said, "A man was planning a big dinner for all his friends. When he had prepared the dinner, he sent his servant to invite the guests. The servant went to the first and said to that one, 'My master invites you.'

That one said, 'Some merchants owe me money; they are coming to me tonight. I have to go and give them instructions. Please excuse me from dinner.'

The servant went to another and said to that one, 'My master has invited you.' That one said to the servant, 'I have bought a house, and I have been called away for a day. I shall have no time.'

The servant went to another and said to that one, 'My master invites you.' That one said to the servant, 'My friend is to be married, and I am to arrange the banquet. I shall not be able to come. Please excuse me from dinner.'

The servant went to another and said to that one, 'My master invites you.' That one said to the servant, 'I have bought an estate, and I am going to collect the rent. I shall not be able to come. Please excuse me.' The servant returned and said to his master, 'Those whom you invited to dinner have asked to be excused.'

The master said to his servant, 'Go out on the streets and bring back whomever you find to have dinner with me.'

## The Holy Communion

O God of life, of all life and of each life,  
we lay our lives before you;

You are before us, God, you are behind.  
You are around us, God, you are within.

O God of life, O generous Spirit,  
Renew us with your life.

Know that you have a place at the feast,

Taste and see that God is good.

## Post-Communion

Heaven is intertwined with earth.  
We have taken the divine life into ourselves.  
By the rowan and the briar,  
By the raging forest fire,  
By the sky in lightning torn,  
By the moon that's newly born,  
By the rising of the sun,  
By this task that we have done  
We bind our feeble souls to Thee. Amen.

*The Rev Jane Barraclough is minister at  
Cross Street Chapel, Manchester.*



# Gellionnen Chapel pulpit restored



The pulpit, focal point of the Gellionnen Chapel, has been restored by the painstaking work of carpenters. Members of the Gellionnen congregation are planning a rededication of their sanctuary in September. The five-year plan to restore the building, attacked by vandals in 2008, will cost £2.5 million.

**By Lewis Rees**

As you may remember Gellionnen chapel was the victim of an appalling attack during March of 2008. However, there is now some light at the end of the tunnel as we endeavour to restore our sanctuary.

After much wrangling with the bureaucratic system that surrounds the restoration of a grade 2\* listed building, work has finally started and the shattered pulpit is once again the grand imposing structure it should be! As a congregation, we have set ourselves a three-stage, five-year, £250,000 plan in order to fully restore the building. With the greatly appreciated help of our Unitarian brothers and sisters, who have raised a sum in the region of £15,000 via the national appeal, we are well on our way to achieving the £90,000 we require at this stage in order to top up the shortfall in the insurance payout and complete part 1 of the restoration

which will ensure the building complies with various legal requirements, and is returned to a good comfortable state for worship.

Once again, I would like to thank you all for your messages of goodwill, and your continued financial assistance as we look to the future, and I will post regular updates as and when significant works have been completed.

If you would like to see moving pictures of how the chapel looks now you can visit the following link on the internet <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/8021622.stm>. The BBC in Wales has been very interested in following our story, and we are grateful to them for keeping us in the public eye. Please continue to keep us in your thoughts and prayers.

*Lewis Rees is student minister at Gellionnen and Graig Unitarian Church, Trebanos, Swansea Valley*

## *It is impossible to worship without love*

*(Continued from page 3)*

than utter reverence, for that moment of knowing is where all of our ideas of God began.

So if we truly appreciate what it means to love one another, then we don't need God. We don't need God as symbol or as

*We simply cannot afford to treat each other badly. Every time we are petty or mean or simply disrespectful, we damage something precious that we might not be able to repair.*

ideal, or as personal representative of the processes of creation or as confidante or intermediary.

But if we are going to do it on our own, we need to know that we simply cannot afford to treat each other badly; that every time we are petty or mean or simply disrespectful we damage something precious that we might not be able to repair.

We can worship without God, but we cannot worship without love: and if we find it easier to love with God in our corner (or the idea of God in our corner) giving us space to repair our mistakes and recover from the slings and arrows of failure, then that is good and fine, and no one should ever disrespect that, or use it as an excuse for feeling superior.

Love is reverence for life, it is said. It works the other way round too: Life is reverence for love. And that, with or without God, is the ultimate purpose of worship: to give love its proper place at the centre of our lives.

*The Rev Tom McCready is minister with Hull Unitarians.*



## Prisons cause crime among young

By Bruce Chilton

It was electric in all senses at the Penal Affairs Panel session at the GA meetings. The former Chief Inspector of Probation and Chair of the Youth Justice Board, Professor Rod Morgan, did not mince words. Too many children and young adults in England and Wales find themselves in front of Courts. Once there, they cannot escape “criminalisation” and this increases, rather than reduces, the likelihood of further offending.

This bleak view was firmly reinforced by the figures, tables and statements, thrown up on the big screen in front of the 60 GA delegates. Young people convicted in the Courts have multiple problems – only 30% live with both parents, 30% have special educational needs, 41% regularly truant from school and 32% are excluded altogether.

Are these youngsters in trouble so different from their parents? No, but until the late 1990s, the government policy was to “divert” young offenders from the Courts. Then the policy changed to “closing the justice gap” and the Youth Justice Board has recently seen, at a time of no increase in youth offending figures, the numbers of young people convicted increase by over a third. The numbers of children and young people imprisoned and the lengths of their sentences have increased dramatically. Now, more are locked up in England and Wales than in any other European country, in both absolute numbers and percentage terms. “It is time to look in other ways,” said Professor Morgan, who resigned his national posts in despair at the failure of government policies.

One of the new ways was presented by John Plummer, Project Director of the East London Young Offenders Academy. At present, more than 200 children from nine London Boroughs are in custody from Devon to Durham. There are no custodial places in London. A pilot scheme is getting underway. A campus site for the first Academy has been identified. The political, social, legal and financial backing is gathering to bring these children back to their home area – to 75 secure places, 75 open places and 75 places for children living in the community.

The Academy will give a full range of services on site, including education, employment training, health and social activities and will be open 365 days each year. What about the cost? John Plummer is prepared to guarantee each place at the Academy will cost less and have much better outputs in terms of further offending than the present system of putting more and more children and young people into custody. “In Scandinavia, child offenders are diagnosed and treated,” he said. “In Britain, we just convict and imprison them.”

The Academy proposal is to be presented to national politicians for a decision.

Would you like to see and hear Rod Morgan’s and John Plummer’s addresses? Now you can by internet on the Unitarian website – go to <http://go.podia.net/?c=1385> and <http://go.podia.net/?c=1386>. They are really good viewing!

*Bruce Chilton is a member of the Octagon Chapel in Norwich.*

## URG slot considered the GA object

By John Roberts

This year marks some 37 years since a group of lay folk and Ministers came together to form the Unitarian Renewal Group (URG); not the best of titles, but at least it was not intended to create a sub-group. This year’s offering at the GA addressed the same subject under the title “Inclusive Worship and the GA Object”.

Three well-known individuals, Louise Rogers, Neville Kenyon and Jeff Teagle gave their appreciation of what being a Unitarian is. Neville began by supporting the URG Statement of Purpose that Unitarian religion today should be defined by principles rather than beliefs and disbeliefs. Then he gave a resumé of his journey through birth, family, Unitarian Young People’s League to now GA vice president. He was concerned at the fact that there was often little difference between a normal non-conformist form of worship and our services. Thus our worship does not reflect our views; this could be that some congregations don’t allow choice, contending, ‘We’ve always done it like that!’. He finished by emphasising that our message of freedom, reason and tolerance should not be frustrated by our inability to adapt our forms of service to the requirements of a dynamic society.

Louise Rogers, fairly new to the denomination, was grateful for the welcome and friendship she found at the various churches she had visited, and was struck by the variety and diversity she had come across. Tradition was a stabilising factor, not open to query and debate. The heart should be open to change and not bound by history; she made a passionate plea that a Unitarian is a Unitarian is a Unitarian. Promoting an enquiring religion is no problem for most of us, but the



*Jeff Teagle addressed the URG. Photo by John Hewerdine.*

word ‘worship’ can in itself be a hurdle because it will have the wrong implications for some. We must be open to change for it is values and principles which hold us together.

Jeff Teagle reminded us of the ethos of bringing churches together and the review of the Objects. He saw the movement going through a trend where the survival of the fittest was not a negative situation, for we are one type of congregation or another.

We get together because we are non-creedal; it is mutual respect which has brought us together, and to enhance the quality and inclusivity of our worship we need to keep abreast of our times and seek new material to prove our worship is alive, such as the production of the new Hymn Book. Watch out for the URG Day Gathering planned for early in 2010.

*The Rev John Roberts is a retired Unitarian minister.*



# Prepare for children at worship

By Martin Gienke

Pew bags, orange squash and a Steiner spiral – all ideas for young and old worshipping together. Mel Prideaux, who leads two sessions a month in her congregation at Wakefield, led the Worship Panel's session on Intergenerational Worship and with her enthusiasm and expertise inspired us to try the same.

'Don't assume you won't have children' was her first message; always be ready, positive and proactive. Have those pew bags ready and filled with interesting and attractive activities for the children who appear. Thinking about the environment of your congregation makes for 'family friendly' worship. A kids' corner, baby changing facilities, orange squash as part of the refreshments and a families' welcomer all send the newcomer the message that they are welcome and wanted. Following her lead the audience offered other suggestions such as smaller seats for children (how hard are those pews?), sound proofing or at least a carpeted area with a heavy curtain, a notice about children outside the church and frequent display of children's work.

These all demonstrate the worth of children's worship (worth-ship). Adjectives abounded for the approach – challenging, stimulating, participative and respectful. Children should be heard and listened to. Also consideration might be given to the transition young people from a 20-minute part in the service to when they attend the entire service – quite a large jump.

Mel showed some ideas in practice including the Steiner Spiral similar to the labyrinth with a single candle in the middle (be sensitive to health and safety and capabilities of children) and garden greenery marking the path. (See photo).

Involving the young and old in the service is not difficult. Mel gave an example for World Aids Day with the congregation moving around the space during the service to read poetry posted around the chapel. Another example was her Remem-



*A Steiner Spiral offers children a meditative form of worship.  
Photo by Ned Prideaux*

brance Sunday service activity in which adults created messages on large paper poppies and the children were asked to arrange them.

Suggesting that the children choose a hymn or music or getting the children to add their percussion accompaniment was also mentioned. Including disabled members of the congregation in activities is also important.

Mel cited some common problems and attitudes which may be present: "It's very nice, but not a Sunday service." "I'm not moving from my pew." "I don't want children disturbing my peace." "It's dumbing down." These are problems to be overcome, or rather challenges, which, with examples of enthusiasm and creative approaches displayed by Mel, can be met if growth is the objective – growth in numbers in the pews and on those little seats and growth in breadth and quality of worship.

*Martin Gienke is chair of the Worship Panel.*

## Partnership support goes beyond firefighting

By Michael Dadson

The Partnership Support Panel slot was used as an opportunity to garner first-hand experience, questions and suggestions – from the core constituents of our community; the people in the pews – about the provision and support of ministry within our movement.

Michael Dadson, who is standing down as panel convenor, explained that over the past two years the panel has been seeking to broaden its mission from one of 'firefighting', when a crisis has developed between a congregation and its spiritual leader, towards one of preparation and prevention to try to make such crises less likely.

The panel has found itself increasingly concerned that there is a lack of continuity and connection between the various groups and agencies which have a part in matters to do with ministry preparation and support. There also appears to be a lack of clarity at congregational level as to just who does what and when with regard to their relationship with their chosen minister or lay leader.

PSP has begun to suggest that the Ministry Commission is the GA body ideally placed to hold an overview, and to co-ordinate the provision of advice and appropriate support at any and all stages of the relationship between a congregation and a

spiritual leader – from preparation to invitation, from appointment to early days, through the developing relationship to its ending (for whatever reason).

In support of a document to that effect, already submitted to the ministry commission and the executive committee, Partnership Support has been inviting information and insight from people at the local level – hence this use of the slot – in order to give a fuller and clearer picture of just how it feels to grapple on the ground with the whole proposition of managing this crucial relationship.

(As his closing piece of work for the panel, Michael is happy to receive and pass on any observations or suggestions you think may be helpful in moving towards greater clarity and cohesiveness in this area. Contact him at [michael.dadson@maccunitarians.co.uk](mailto:michael.dadson@maccunitarians.co.uk) )

As its report to the GA stated, the panel continues its work in responding to crises (where possible), and is developing strategies for helping congregations to prepare themselves before initiating a new ministry, as well as looking at ways to support a positive and constructive ending where the relationship comes to its close.

*The Rev Michael Dadson is minister at Macclesfield and Newcastle-under-Lyme*



# UCA offered a taste of Taizé chant

By Jean McNeile

The Rev Jeff Gould and Cathy Fozard led the introduction to Taizé worship, sponsored by the Unitarian Christian Association at the GA meetings.

I had been asked to hand out photocopies of the Taizé chants before the session started. And it was then that I realised we Unitarians do not easily sit together, as people sat far and wide over the very large Molloy Hall. As I began to run out of my sheets of paper, I tried desperately to negotiate and introduce strangers to each other so that they would sit together and share. And this struggle to gather and share seemed rather ironic, as Jeff talked of life in the Taizé community as being all about gathering people in, especially the young. And when people arrived at the village, (some times as many as 5000 people at any one time) the sense of community was all embracing, regardless of race, nationality and privilege.

I have to admit that I experienced a rather 'British' reserve once the presentation describing the history and ethos of the Taizé community came to an end, as those attending suddenly realised that they were going to sing chants, and perhaps even more reticently, to sing in Latin!

And yet, much to my surprise, I noticed a calm atmosphere

slowly took over the hall, and the singing became much less strained and more meditative. It seemed unimportant that we did not know the language and meaning of all the words we sang and in the repetition of those words a setting of loving and positive peace thrived.

The whole of the session had been very simplistic and fresh, we all contributed through song and I felt that we were all equal and in a spiritual harmony within that specific Unitarian congregation.

I truly appreciated Jeff and Cathy's great efforts to give us all such a wonderful taste of Taizé, especially as some unknown person had hindered the smooth running of the proceedings by changing the settings of the presentation equipment just prior to the worship session. Cathy and Jeff gave us a quiet and calming time of worship in a rather hectic GA. The Taizé village in Eastern France welcomes people from all over the world and on leaving, asks them to go out as 'Pilgrims of Trust on Earth'. I wonder, are we Unitarians also such pilgrims, I sincerely hope so.

*The Rev Jean McNeile is minister at Padiham.*

Taizé podcasts of chants, meditation and even the bells at Taizé are available at: [www.taize.fr/en\\_article681.html](http://www.taize.fr/en_article681.html)

## Is 'radical hospitality' just too radical?

By Tony Rees

For the second year running, GA attenders were treated to a session on 'radical hospitality'. The 2009 event was jointly sponsored by the Faith and Public Issues and the Denominational Support Commissions. It was led by Karen Hanley, student minister Andy Pakula and the Rev Linda Hart – all members of the London District Growth Group. They drew on exercises trialled in the LDPA, which many present found challenging. The first of these invited participants to write on a postcard something – a secret perhaps – which they would not wish to share with others. They were then asked to fold the message, concealing their words, and put the cards into a receptacle. From there the cards were randomly redistributed to others present who read out the contents – anonymously so far as their originators were concerned.

Not everyone seemed happy with this procedure. A few withheld their cards. Others wrote that they couldn't think of anything to write. Yet others owned up to the most minor of misdemeanours. However, there were occasional confessions of a genuinely sensitive nature.

Overall, the surprising impression was, as Tony McNeile noted, of an audience of mature and mostly pretty successful adults admitting they lacked self-confidence in various areas of life. In a second exercise individuals formed partnerships, each speaking uninterrupted for 10 minutes before handing over to the other.

Many participants found it hard to contribute no more than the occasional helpful cough or prompt, and monologues turned into dialogues. The experiment demonstrated the very basic truth that many of us are not very good at listening. The enhancement of self-awareness is usually desirable and greater sensitivity to the reactions of others is always so. Nevertheless, even after two exposures to the concept, I have problems with 'radical hospitality'. The phrase comes from the Benedictine tradition, but it is ob-

scure. It seems to be fashionable to create double-barrelled names, neither half of which is readily understandable. 'Extraordinary rendition' is another, more sinister, example. (Although I suppose that those in charge of Guantanamo Bay might claim that 'radical hospitality' is exactly what their facility provides). The session was built around the nostrum: "Open your hearts, your minds and the doors of your congregation."

However, in her opening remarks, Karen Hanley ventured that her audience might have been expecting instruction in the "design of a welcome bag or something like that". This juxtaposition highlights the gap between the airy, aspiring slogan and the realities encountered on the meeting-house floor, where practical problems abound – like how to protect newcomers from the congregation's bores. The effective greeting of visitors is more complex than at first appears, but it certainly does not require professional training in counselling.

Some people undoubtedly come to churches for the first time because of a personal crisis or loss. Eliciting and helping with such traumas requires skilled intervention, which might be expected from a suitably trained minister, lay pastor or lay leader, but not from an ordinary member of a congregation. Moreover, newcomers may be wary of 'openness', as being somehow un-British. Near the end of the session, the meeting broke into groups; mine assumed that 'radical hospitality' was an import from the USA. A fellow member was the Rev Jane Dwinell, the American minister who made so big an impression during the Growth session. She denied that the British have a monopoly of reserve: New England – whence she comes – values reticence as highly as we do. It would likely be different, she allowed, in California. Some of our congregations need to become more welcoming to strangers, but friendliness must never turn into intrusion.

*Tony Rees is a member of the Faith and Public Issues Commission.*



# 'Rev Bob' is honoured in Dundee

By Janet Briggs

On 16 May the Scottish Unitarian Association (SUA) held a celebratory lunch in the Queens Hotel, Dundee. Guests of honour were the Rev Bob Wightman and his wife Mary, at the start of their presidential year – he as president of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian churches, she as president of the Unitarian Women's League.

About 80 people, most from the four Scottish Unitarian churches, plus a few from further afield, enjoyed lunch together and listened to speeches. First came John Letford, the Lord Provost of Dundee. He spoke warmly of his friend Bob, outlining his career from marketing to ministry and from Glasgow to Dundee, where he has become a well-loved and valued member of the community, not least because of his weekly Sunday morning talk on Radio Tay.

The second speaker was Alistair Ballingall of Radio Tay, where Bob has worked for 20 years. Ally praised Bob's personal style of speaking, as if there were only one listener out there, when in fact, audience figures show that many people tune in for Bob's half hour at 8am, and then go off to start the day.

He was followed by Victor Herd, president of the Dundee Ex-Services Association, of which the Rev Bob has been chaplain for many years. Together they have led many a church parade, and side-by-side led the mourners at many a funeral. Victor thanked Bob for his personal touch, listening to problems and offering an encouraging word.

Scottish Women's League President, Barbara Clifford offered congratulations to Mary Wightman on becoming National President in the League's 100<sup>th</sup> year. Although there have been other couples to hold both presidencies, never before have they done it simultaneously. Former General Assembly presidents Bert Inkson and Joyce Ashworth were among the guests, and so were former league presidents Jean Inkson and Theresa Taylor. Dot Hewerdine, our link with the GA Executive Committee, was present along with husband John, and so was Jen Atkinson who has performed that duty for the past three years.



The Rev Bob and Mary Wightman are greeted by the Lord Provost of Dundee. Photo by Jane Aaronson

Bob and Mary's sons David and Colin, who are local undertakers, were present with their wives. David followed his mother in saying how proud the family is of their hard-working and popular father, and how busy and fragmented the Wightman household will be during the coming year of presidential visits.

Bill Stephen of Aberdeen ably compered the meeting, in his role (complete with badge of office) as President of the SUA, and it fell to his Deputy, Roddy Macpherson to thank all the speakers. He told us that he was just returned from Transylvania, where the liberal faith that is Unitarianism began in 1561, in the reign of King John Sigismund of that country. Roddy had been speaking at a conference there and had playfully informed a Romanian history professor that Transylvanian history was much respected in his home country. The Rev. Maud Robinson of Edinburgh gave the opening grace, in Irish Gaelic and English, and Rev. Bob spoke the benediction that closed the proceedings.

*Janet Briggs is a member of the congregation at Glasgow.*



The Rev Jeff Gould, minister of Bury Unitarian Church, Good Friday devotions in the garden of the church, as part of the Bury Town Centre Walk of Witness. After two years of involvement with Churches Together in Bury, the Unitarian congregation has been welcomed as a full member. To the left of Jeff is the Rev Francis Wadsworth, priest of Saint Marie's Roman Catholic Church, Bury. Photo by the Bury Times

## 'Dickens: Shadows And Ghosts'

by Barry Cundill

Highgate Publications, 2008

£8-50 from the author at 12 Compton Drive, Keyingham, East Yorkshire, HU12 9RR

Review by Cliff Reed

Barry Cundill is both a family historian and a Dickens enthusiast, and in this book he attempts to bring the fruits of these two interests together. I don't really think he succeeds, though. As a family history it is, as far as one can tell, well-researched.

We are introduced to some interesting characters, not least a General Baptist minister with Unitarian leanings who had a knack of falling out with his congregations and who finally came to a tragic end in a shipping disaster. Less successful is Cundill's highly speculative attempt to link his family's history with the life and work of Charles Dickens. His constant switching from one to the other is, I'm afraid, irritating rather than enlightening and the overall effect is one of contrivance and confusion.



# Letters to the Editor

## What is going on at Essex Hall?

To the Editor:

I am sure that I am not alone in voicing my concern for the immediate future of our headquarters staff following the resignation – for whatever cause – of, first, our Chief Executive Steve Dick and then, more recently, of Peter Teets who seemed to have taken on the role of unofficial deputy at Essex Hall.

As I see it – perhaps incorrectly – there is no one there at present to give any sort of overall leadership on a day-to-day basis. We know that the Executive Committee are going in when they can but however good and dedicated they are there is no substitute for someone in overall charge.

Can we know what is happening at Essex Hall please?

**Mike Tomlin**

Stockton Unitarians

## Growth and ministers: chicken and egg?

To the Editor:

EC Member Andy Pakula is reported as saying ('New Executive sets out its priorities', 30 May *Inquirer*) that 'We

won't survive as a denomination without *paid, professional* leadership in our congregations', and goes on to say that 'Growth (I assume he means numerical growth) won't happen'.

To place the responsibility for growth on ministers, assuming that it is ministers that he is talking about, raises at least two interesting questions:

In a declining denomination:

From where are extra ministers to be recruited?

How many congregations, or, groups of congregations, are in a position to raise the minimum of £30,000 per annum to pay for a minister?

Realistically, we must – first of all – grow numerically. That way we shall increase the pool of people from which ministry students can be called, and, hopefully, increase overall income.

Furthermore, we must not hold just one section of our community responsible for growth. We must all be involved.

**Peter Whitham**

Stockton Unitarians

## Unitarians should honour

### James Edward Smith

It is a great shame that the 250th anniversary of the birth of (Sir) James

Edward Smith – the founder and first president of the Linnean Society – has not been recognised by Unitarians. According to Smith's biography by Margot Walker, published by the Linnean Society of London in 1988, James obtained a botanical book at age 18 and 'first comprehended the nature of the systematic arrangement and the Linnean principles'. He enrolled to study medicine at Edinburgh University, although he had no intention of becoming a doctor: he could study the sciences. Once there, he threw himself into every opportunity to widen his botanical knowledge. A happy facility in making friends, many of whom he retained for life, was a great help; one such was Sir Joseph Banks, who later sailed as botanist with Captain Cook to the Pacific. Strictly speaking he was born into a Presbyterian family, but his father and grandfather were subscribers to the building of the Octagon Chapel, Norwich, and it was to that city that he brought the Linnean collection when he had the opportunity to purchase it, as founder-president of the Linnean Society.

**Sophia Hankinson**

Norwich

# Obituary: Evelyn Nuttall, friend, guide

*Longtime Unitarian Evelyn Nuttall died in April. Her friend Neil Sanders shares some memories of Evelyn, who was part of the Brixton congregation at a key time in its history.*

I first met Evelyn in 1982, when my wife Viv and I decided to go to Brixton Unitarian Church. Evelyn was then the Chair of the Church. She had been a member since before the War joining, I believe, in response to an advertisement which appealed to her intellect. Her intellectual and spiritual development was particularly influenced by the minister at that time, Rev EG (George) Lee, a considerable personality and a mystic. The original Victorian Church was destroyed by a bomb in 1940, and Evelyn was the treasurer for the building of the new church, hall, committee room, manse and caretaker's bungalow on the site. It must have been a major project indeed for quite a young woman.

We never knew Evelyn's mother, for whom she had cared for many years, and we didn't know Evelyn in the days when she so enjoyed walking in the country. For the entire time we knew Evelyn, she was disabled by rheumatoid arthritis, although when we first met her she was quite mobile and had got herself out of her earlier bedridden state by adopting the Doctor Dong Diet. But somehow you never noticed Evelyn's disability. However poor her physical state, you always came

away feeling she had given you good cheer. She was a source of great wisdom in the conduct of the business of the church, and churches are not easy organisations to run, partly because people's engagement with it is naturally emotional. She was also very ingenious in working out physical solutions to overcome problems that might have prevented her staying in her own home. Such was her sense of personal dignity that she would ask us not to visit during the lowest points of her ill-health.

We were glad to be able to help Evelyn when she had to move from the flat she had shared with her mother to a smaller, modern flat in Turney Road – a move that she found very upsetting at the time, but was subsequently very relieved to have undertaken. Much later we managed to arrange for her sitting room to be re-carpeted while she was in hospital with a broken hip, and her delight at the result was typical and a source of enormous pleasure to us. Sadly, it was only a few weeks later that she fell and broke her other hip, and was then never to return to the flat again.

It was a great privilege and joy to have known Evelyn, and I hope her example of determination and cheerfulness in the face of adversity will always live with us.

*Neil Sanders*



# A mayor, a rabbi and a priest – no joke!

**By Andie Camper**

Westgate Chapel invited the Mayor of Lewes, Councillor Michael Chartier, to officially make a statement about Westgate re-opening again following the first stage of our renovation works. In his statement he spoke of the distinguished History of Westgate and its former members and declared this House of Prayer for all people re-opened.

On the theme of a house of prayer for all people Westgate had invited other faith leaders to join us in our celebrations and bring interfaith prayers for peace in the world.

The service that followed included a Hebrew Blessing upon the building brought by Rabbi Elli from Brighton and Hove's progressive synagogue, who, upon discovering the following reading was Psalm 133, offered to sing this first in Hebrew to the delight of all gathered. Other guests brought their prayers and thoughts; Father Biggenstaff brought a reading of the Pope's message about Peace from the Lewes Roman Catholic Church. This was then presented to the Rev Andie Camper.

Our friends the Quakers, who kindly allowed us to use their building during our exile, brought us a time of silence. The Methodist/URC minister reminded us about Methodists using Westgate during their lack of a building for a while, then led us in prayers used by the Women's World day of prayer, and the prayer of St Francis.

Unitarians did readings of scripture and of poetry; our organist played 'O lovely Peace' for us as a meditation.

The Rev Andie Camper gave an address on the theme of "Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony." a quote from the Mahatma Gandhi. Pointing out that Harmony does not always demand the same instruments, and speaking of the words of the Dalai Lama in regards to working towards the Art of Happiness. The service was concluded in the words of Timothy Sprigg in his re-working of the Lords Prayer.

Tea and Coffee followed the service and friendships old and new continued in this time. It was good to see representatives of other local Unitarian Congregations coming along and join-



*The Rev Andie Camper was one of several speakers at the re-opening of Westgate Chapel in Lewes. Photo by Adrian Morris*

ing the happy few at Westgate. A collection was made for the initiative Faiths working together in Gaza and this raised £78.

Thanks go to all who supported this initiative at Westgate Unitarian Chapel in Lewes.

*The Rev Andie Camper is a minister associated with Westgate Chapel in Lewes.*

## MUA learned about Engagement Groups

**By Sue Woolley**

In May, 19 delegates from seven Midland Unitarian Association congregations attended a whole-day training course about Small Group Ministry, led by the inspirational Rev Jim Robinson of Hampstead.

They gathered at Kingswood Meeting House and after a spiritual opening session to remind us that we are a spiritual community, not just a social club, we all "checked in", by sharing the wide variety of small groups that exist in our congregations. These included discussion, Friday Light, charity work, choir, rambling, retreats, Inquirer, small group worship, district work, and committees. We then shared what we appreciated about these small groups, and what the possible barriers were to them fulfilling their potentials.

Jim then took us through the basic principles of Small Group Ministry and Engagement Groups, including their intention, structure, engagement sharing principles, and facilitation. We learned that the reason for small groups is to deepen the

spiritual life of the participants; to create community among them; to enable them to live in 'right relationship' with the rest of the world; and to deepen their connections with their church or chapel.

After lunch, we were taught how to listen to our fellow human beings, avoiding stereotyping ourselves and others. We were then invited to put this into practice, by splitting up into pairs, which was both fun and instructive. Then Jim took us through some of the practical issues of running an Engagement Group, about the meeting space; time questions; leadership; focus or purpose; the name of the group; the covenant between members; the structure of sessions; and the issues of problem behaviour and confidentiality.

The day was rounded off by a "check-out" session to balance the "check-in" in the morning, and a short spiritual closing.

*Sue Woolley is district facilitator for the Midland Unitarian Association.*





The Rev Ernest Baker receives a cheque for the "Send a Child to Hucklow" (SACH) fund from Emma Lowe at the monthly Coffee Evening held at Dukinfield. SACH brings underprivileged children to the Unitarian Conference Centre at Great Hucklow for summer holidays. Ernest gave a Power Point presentation at the coffee evening and discussed the history of SACH.

## Great Hucklow Open Day on 27 June

Please come along to Open Day at The Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre on Saturday, 27 June starting at 11am.

We are looking for enthusiastic teams of four of to enter 'It's a Unitarian Knockout'. So come on lets have a good old go, I'm sure there are some old scores to settle (good-natured ones of course)! Also we will have plants, bric-a-brac, cakes, cards, a village history tour, a raffle, children's fancy dress, a lucky dip and games.

Catch up with friends and acquaintances you haven't seen in ages and enjoy the countryside, there will be something for everyone. Good food and drinks will be available – as we are now licensed – and, if possible, we will also order sunshine.

– Stella Burney



Members of the Brahma Samaj choir perform at a special service held at Golders Green Unitarians in north London on Sunday 3 May which celebrated two giants of this Hindu reform faith: its founder Rammohan Roy and the Nobel prize-winning poet Rabindranath Tagore (both of whom were born in May). The choir sang Tagorean songs and a Rammohan Roy hymn, accompanied by an Indian harmonium and guitar. The service was led by the Rev Feargus O'Connor, minister at Golders Green, with prayers from Manju Chaudhuri of the Brahma Samaj. Photo by Jim Corrigan

## Lay training day in July

On Saturday, 11 July at Luther King House, Rusholme, Manchester, the Joined up Education Panel, under the auspices of the Education and Training Commission, is holding a training day for lay people. Its theme is "What's going on here? Dynamics of worship explored".

The day goes from 10.30 am to 4 pm and sessions will be led by the Rev Dr Vernon Marshall and Rev Dr Ann Peart. The cost of the day is £5 – plus lunch. (Bring your own or book in advance.) Tea and coffee will be provided.

Bookings and further information are available from Liz Shaw. Reach her on e-mail at [lizzy.shaw50@btinternet.com](mailto:lizzy.shaw50@btinternet.com) Or telephone 01433 630541.



## Rado Davies, still church treasurer at 92

In the photo Rev Cen Llwyd minister of Ciliau Aeron Unitarian Chapel presents a card to Mrs Rado Davies from Felin-fach as she celebrated her 92nd birthday on Easter Saturday.

The photograph was taken outside Ciliau Aeron Unitarian Chapel where not only is Mrs Davies a member and regular, faithful attendee of the congregation, but she is also the chapel's treasurer and has been in post since 1972. Previously, for five years, she was a treasurer at nearby Cribyn Unitarian chapel.

Mrs Davies is a retired teacher and the Rev Cen Llwyd is of the opinion that she is definitely the oldest active Unitarian Treasurer in Wales and most probably any other Unitarian chapel throughout Britain.

"It would be interesting to know whether any other denominations have a person as old as Mrs Davies doing similar voluntary work as officers of congregations.

"We in Ceredigion think the world of Mrs Davies and appreciate her valuable service. Without a doubt she is the backbone of the chapel. We look forward to celebrating her 100th birthday and knowing Mrs Davies, if she continues in good health, then she will also be as loyal and committed then as she is now, and knowing her as I do, I would not be surprised that she will also be the treasurer at that time!"

– Cen Llwyd